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ABSTRACT

This paper develops the principles which underly the policy statement of the Canadian Teachers' Federation. The introductory material discusses the need to study foreign language in today's interdependent world, and particularly in Canada, an officially bilingual country. Also discussed are the enrollment trends in the provinces and the aims and objectives of a French Second Language program. Regarding the level of competency to be achieved, it is stated that every student has the right to attain a basic competency. This is defined as a good knowledge of the language, ability to make oneself understood in conversation, ability to read standard texts, some knowledge of French-speaking communities, and ability to take up the study of French again at a later date. The aims of middle and top level classes are outlined as well as criteria for achievement on all levels. The criteria concern: (1) time on task, (2) teacher education, (3) teaching materials and cultural orientation, (4) class size and pupil/teacher contact, (5) support services, and (6) parental and community contact. Finally, it is proposed that basic competency in a second language be instituted as a requirement for admission to any university and that the government of Canada promote language education. (AMH)

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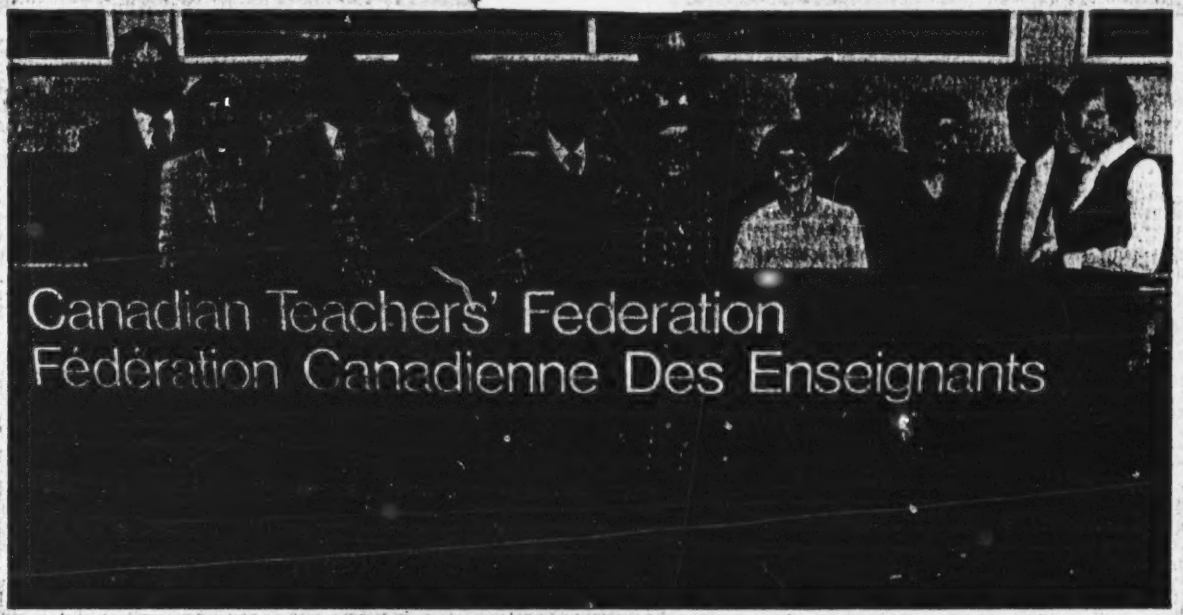
The Teaching of French as a Second Language



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Canadian Teachers' Federation

A POSITION PAPER

ON

THE TEACHING OF FRENCH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Introduction

In July 1978 the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Teachers' Federation established a Commission on French as a Second Language:

(a) To study and advise CTF with respect to matters peculiar to providing French second language education;

(b) To review the national scene in the area of French second language education and recommend policies and programs to the Board of Directors; and,

(c) To study matters referred by the Board of Directors and to make appropriate reports.

The Commission, chaired by a member of the CTF Board of Directors and composed of nine other members, each a specialist in the teaching of French as a second language, has completed the third year of a three-year mandate. In July 1981 a four-person committee was established to continue the work of the Commission.

At the request of the Commission a comprehensive bibliography on The Teaching of French as a Second Language was published by CTF in September 1979. A Survey of the Status of the Teaching of French as a Second Language Within CTF Member Organization Jurisdictions was carried out. A report of that Survey was approved by the Board of Directors for publication in February 1980.

The Commission prepared, and the Board of Directors has endorsed in principle, a Proposal for the Establishment of a Canadian Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.

The Commission also proposed a CTF policy statement on French Second Language Education. The policy statement was adopted by the CTF Annual Meeting in July 1981.

Policy as used by CTF, is a statement of philosophy or principles, or of CTF's stance or attitude in relation to matters whose resolution is beyond the legislative power of the Annual General Meeting. A position paper, on the other hand, is a development or expansion of the philosophy or principles from which the policy derived. It is usually the result of extensive study and research. Such is the background of the position paper developed by the Commission. It is the culmination of three years of study and practical research.

The Study of Other Languages

In the era when secondary and post-secondary education was the reserve of an elitist society (not so long ago) the study of a second language, Latin or Greek, was designated as a required discipline to be mastered by those who would be called "students" and who would elect to go beyond the level of basic education available to most children. It was largely an artificial barrier to admission to the society of the educationally elite. French, too, was offered to the privileged few as the language of diplomacy. It was argued then, and still is, that the study of other languages is a basic part of literacy; that the study of other languages has a positive transfer effect upon mastery of the mother tongue; that it facilitates a thorough understanding of the mother tongue, the derivation of vocabulary and the structures of the language. Indeed, the argument today is strengthened by some research which demonstrates that second language studies have an educationally positive effect on achievement in the basic skills, as well as other cognitive benefits.

But the study of a second language today has additional and more cogent motivation. Communication, in terms of media and transportation, has developed to such an extent that "the world community" now is a meaningful concept. And Canada, too, is a multicultural country. Teaching a foreign language in its cultural context is a potential force in creating positive attitudes toward the peoples represented by that language. As the Honourable Les Usher, Alberta Minister of Culture, observed, "Language is the tie which binds one part of humanity to the other".[1] The study of other languages assists students to broaden their understanding of man and the world. Knowledge of a second language is also useful, and often essential, in many careers.

Two Official Languages in Canada

The curriculum depends on, and must take account of, the education policy of the Government. Canada is an officially bilingual country within a multicultural context. One of the early conclusions of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism was that:

> "The need for second-language teaching cannot be seriously questioned. The majority of Canadians are aware of this need and feel that all children should study either French or English as a second language in school. The national interest also underlines the need for Canadian children to study the second official language. The question, therefore, is not so much whether it should be taught but rather how it can be better taught."[2]

The importance of teaching the second official language has long been recognized and is provided for in the curriculum of every province.

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[1] Learning First and Second Languages: A Valuable Asset, Hon. Les Usher, Alberta Minister of Culture, Alberta Modern Language Journal, Vol. 17, No. 1, Fall 1978.

[2] Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, Vol. 2, Queen's Printer, Ottawa, 1968, p. 206.

Commitment and Regulation

The degree of provincial/territorial commitment to French second language education, as indicated from a survey of regulations and curriculum requirements, can only be described as weak and haphazard. On the other hand, there is a growing number of school boards in many jurisdictions, particularly in large urban and suburban areas, which have done much in the development and extension of second language programs.

In general, the expansion of second language programs in elementary schools over the past decade has been outstanding. In 1970, 28% of English-speaking elementary students were enrolled in FSL programs. By 1979, the figure had risen to 45%. The record at the secondary school level shows a disappointing decline. From a total enrolment of 55.8% of high school students in FSL programs in nine provinces in 1970-71, the percentage dropped to 41.5% in 1979-80.

It may be of some comfort to rationalize the decrease in secondary student enrolment in FSL programs as the result of our permissive society and free choice of subject options by students. However, we must recognize that we are presented with a problem which requires some resolution.

The vast majority of English-speaking parents want their children to learn French as a second language. But they want them to learn more than the traditional programs have provided in the past. With the mobility of Canada's population, assurance is sought that second language programs commenced in one jurisdiction will be available in another.

On the other hand, school boards are hard pressed to meet the many educational service demands made upon them. When financial restraints force them to select priorities they are not always in a position to judge the relative merits of one program over another. It remains for the provincial/territorial authorities to regulate what courses shall be required and at what levels; to provide for the necessary expertise for research and development; to ensure equity in every school board's ability to provide the required human and material resources.

Aims and Objectives of A French Second Language Program

> "The immediate aim of second language teaching is concerned with the four basic skills -- understanding the spoken language and the ability to speak, read and write it."[3]

A secondary aim is, through the guidance of a socially sensitive teacher, to teach the second language in relation to people of that language in the community, and thereby to foster in children an understanding and tolerance of different cultures.

> "The aim of second-language teaching is not to produce a generation of completely bilingual Canadians, any more than the aim of physical education is to produce a nation of gymnasts. The extent to which the school can develop the four language skills will vary with the community; obviously an English-speaking child has a better chance of learning French in Ottawa than in Calgary because of the environment, and the same is true for a French-speaking

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[3] Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, op.cit., p. 231.

child learning English in Montreal as compared with Chicoutimi. The degree of skill acquired will vary from one community to the next, but the basic aim should be the same in all cases. Second-language teaching should lay a solid foundation so that after graduation the student may develop, retain, or re-acquire the skills he needs. The school should not be expected to perfect these language skills but it should enable graduates to become bilingual if they have the desire and the opportunity to do so."[4]

Though the basic aim should be the same in all cases, this is not to be interpreted to mean that certain communities or groups of parents should not have second languages programs in their schools which are designed to surpass the basic aim. In certain communities and for certain students studying a second language the basic aim may be considered inadequate. Higher levels of competency may be legitimate aspirations.

Levels of Competency

A major study undertaken in Ontario[5] stresses the importance of defining realistic aims of a second language program. It describes three levels of competency as realistic objectives attainable at the end of secondary schooling for different types of second language programs:

"Basic level

The student:

1) has a good fundamental knowledge of the language: its grammar, pronunciation, and idiom; has an active vocabulary of 3000-3500 words, and about 100 basic sentence patterns;

2) can make himself understood in conversation;

3) can read, with the aid of a dictionary, standard texts written without stylistic difficulties on subjects within his interest;

4) has some knowledge of French-speaking communities;

5) is capable of re-commencing the study of French at a higher level when motivated to do so in later life.

Middle level

The student:

1) can read books of personal interest and newspapers with occasional help from the dictionary;

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[4] Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, op.cit., p. 232.

[5] Ontario Ministry of Education, Report of the Ministerial Committee on the Teaching of French, Toronto, Ontario, 1974 (The Gillin Report), pp. 22-23.

2) understands radio and television news and programs in which he is personally interested;

3) can participate adequately in conversations;

4) has absorbed information about the culture, society, customs, economy, government, and institutions of the French-speaking community he is interested in;

5) could function quite well in a French community after a few months' residence.

Top level

The student:

1) can take further education in French in a bilingual educational institution; that is, understand lectures, write papers, take part in class discussions;

2) can accept training or employment in the other language, or live in the other language community, after a short period of induction training;

3) can participate easily in conversations;

4) understands and shares the emotional attitudes and the values held in common by members of the other community, since he possesses a core of ideas, items of knowledge, and concepts available to the native speaker."

Criteria for Achievement

(a) Time on Task

"Having decided upon objectives in terms of specified levels of achievement in different aspects of foreign language competence, educational authorities must consider the amounts of time required by different types of students to attain those objectives, and make curricular provision for these amounts of instructional time.

The data of the present study suggests that the primary factor in the attainment of proficiency in French (and presumably, any foreign language) is the amount of instructional time provided."[6]

[6] John B. Carroll, The Teaching of French as a Foreign Language in Eight Countries, Halsted Press, Toronto, 1975, p. 276.

There is a considerable variety of opinion as to the cumulative in structional time requisite for students to achieve the levels of competency outlined above. The Ontario Ministry of Education[7] has assumed that the objectives may be achieved with instructional programs as follows:

"1. Basic Level

Achievable through a CORE PROGRAM, a basic pattern of instruction in French as a second language per se, usually in periods of 20 to 40 minutes per day, with a cumulative total of at least 1,200 instructional hours.

2. Middle Level

Achievable through an EXTENDED PROGRAM, the Core Program, plus one or more subjects taught in the French language, with a cumulative total of at least 2,100 instructional hours.

3. Top Level

Achievable through an IMMERSION PROGRAM in which most of the pupil's instruction is given using French as the language of communication for a cumulative total of at least 5,000 instructional hours."

(b) Teacher Education

Research reported by John B. Carroll, "indicate(s) that teacher competence in the foreign language ... makes a significant difference in student outcomes."[8] How much more significant it is that the teacher of French as a second language in Canadian schools not only be competent in the French language but, in addition, be able to convey an understanding and appreciation of the French Canadian culture within the Canadian mosaic!

Second language instruction must observe the same principles laid down for other areas of instruction: it must provide for different developmental stages, varying learning styles, active participation, and must ensure a degree of success for all children. Programs must offer variety in depth, pace and activity. Such an instructional program implies a comprehensive education in the general psychology of learning and teaching methodology. In addition, second language teaching methodology and strategies are essential components of the second language teacher's preparation. Education in linguistics is an important additional component.

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[7] Ontario Ministry of Education, Teaching and Learning French as a Second Language, Toronto, Ontario, April 1977.

[8] John B. Carroll, op.cit., p. 277.

(c) Teaching Materials and Cultural Orientation

Language cannot be taught in a cultural vacuum. While the primary function of teaching French as a second language is not the development of a cultural awareness and understanding of French Canada, it is an important adjunct. "In our judgement", observes the Task Force on Canadian Unity, "the first and foremost challenge facing the country is to create an environment in which duality might flourish."[9] Creating an awareness of the historical traditions and the contemporary life of French Canadians is an important element in meeting that challenge.

Secondly, there are important pedagogical advantages in using the Canadian scene and contemporary life for the teaching of the second language. Motivation is the key to successful language learning. English Canadians are interested in learning about their French compatriots. French second language teachers should take advantage of that interest. Textbooks, teaching aids and supplementary material should all reflect that the second language is the language of other Canadians. It is obviously necessary to teach the language which the other group will understand. Contrary to many misconceptions, French is a highly standardized language. There is a version of French recognized and accepted by Francophones throughout the world and spoken by well-educated French Canadians. This international French, le français standard, should be the language of instruction for any French second language program. A major adaptation needed is the addition of some commonly used words, expressions and accents unique to French Canada.

The FSL program alone should not be perceived as the only vehicle for the promotion of understanding and appreciation of the French culture. Other subjects provide an appropriate medium. In Canadian literature there is a wealth of material on French Canadians and French Canada -- stories of exploration, episodes in the lives of early settlers, biographies, etc. Similarly, in Canadian history, there is much to be included to acquaint students with the history of French Canadians and of their cultural development.

(d) Class Size and Pupil/Teacher Contact

While there is a lack of empirical data to support definitions of optimum class size for French second language classes, it is, nevertheless evident that class size has a major effect on the success of FSL programs. The smaller the class, the greater frequency that the individual child has to practise oral expression.

Similarly, it is important that a reasonable limit be placed upon the number of students for whom an FSL teacher has responsibility. This is of critical importance if the teacher is to learn the strengths and weaknesses of individual students and give them appropriate assistance, encouragement and motivation.

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[9] The Task Force on Canadian Unity, A Future Together, Observations and Recommendations, Supply and Services Canada, 1979, p. 21.

(e) Support Services

It is inevitable, particularly in years of rapidly expanding demand for FSL programs, that many FSL teachers have not completed the appropriate level of specialized training. Though support services are required for all teachers, they are particularly essential for the undertrained FSL teacher and should include consultant services in the teaching of FSL.

(f) Parental and Community Contact

Frequent and ongoing parent and community contacts are needed to provide support and encouragement for students and teachers and, in particular, to ensure an understanding of the realistic objectives of the FSL program.

Role of Universities

Basic competency in a second language should be instituted as a requirement for admission to any faculty of education. The study of the associated literature and culture should be a required part of any education program as well as second language maintenance and/or development courses. In addition, universities should give special consideration to the introduction of these requirements for undergraduate courses in all other faculties. Such requirements would do much to raise the prestige of second language studies at the secondary school level and would contribute much toward world understanding and intercultural tolerance.

Role of the Canadian Government

The Government of Canada should promote official second language education:

(a) by the provision of incentive grants to the provinces and territories to encourage and assist them in providing an increased opportunity for members of the majority official language group in each province or territory to acquire a knowledge of their second official language, and for members of the minority official language group in each province or territory to be educated in their own official language;

(b) by the establishment and funding of a Canadian clearinghouse on relative research and development.

Summary

(a) The study of a second language should be a requisite and integral part of the basic curriculum in elementary and secondary schools in Canada.

(b) The opportunity to study French as a second language is a basic right of students in Canadian elementary and secondary schools where English is the language of instruction.

(c) This basic right should be guaranteed by appropriate legislation in the respective provinces.

(d) French second language programs should involve adequate cumulative time and should be sufficiently intensive so that:

(i) students will achieve at least basic competency in the language by the end of the secondary school program;

(ii) students will acquire an understanding of French culture, and in particular, of French Canadian culture;

(iii) the aspirations of certain communities and/or students who seek higher levels of linguistic competency may be realized.

(e) Literature and social studies programs should include components designed to promote understanding and appreciation of French culture.

(f) The Government of Canada should promote official second language education:

(i) by the provision of incentive grants to the provinces and territories to encourage and assist them in providing an increased opportunity for members of the majority official language group in each province or territory to acquire a knowledge of their second official language, and for members of the minority official language group in each province or territory to be educated in their own official language;

(ii) by the establishment and funding of a Canadian clearinghouse on relative research and development.

Note: The statements contained in the above summary were adopted at the Annual General Meeting, July 1981, as policy of the Canadian Teachers' Federation.

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November 2, 1981
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COMMISSION ON FRENCH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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